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Art Unit: ***

CLMPTO

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NP

1. A method for checking a franking mark (28) comprising at least an identification code and a unique bit string, comprising the following steps:
 - a. reading (800-804) of the franking mark (28),
 - b. decoding (808-810) of the franking mark (28),
 - c. checking (908-910) whether the identification code is correct by comparing it to data stored in a memory (40),
 - d. checking (1002-1014) whether the unique bit string is valid by comparing it to data stored in said memory (40).
2. A method according to Claim 1, in which the identification code and the unique bit string are protected with the aid of a Message Authentication Code and/or by means of encoding and the method also comprises the step of checking (902-904) of the Message Authentication Code and/or the encoding.

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--3.(Amended) A method according to Claim 1, in which the franking mark comprises a terminal identification code associated with a terminal which provided the unique bit string to a user.--

--4.(Amended) A method according to claim 1, in which the identification code comprises a user identification code and/or a printing identification code, said printing identification code being associated with a printing device which printed the franking mark.--

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--5.(Amended) A method according to claim 1, in which the franking mark comprises a combination of the unique bit string and a counter value, and the method also comprises the following steps:

- e. subtracting the counter value from a remaining counter value stored with said unique bit string in said memory (40) and checking whether the remaining counter value amounts to more than zero, and, if so, then establishing that the franking mark is valid, and, if not, then establishing that the franking mark is invalid.--

--6.(Amended) A method according to claim 1, in which the franking mark comprises a combination of the unique bit string and a counter value and the method also comprises the following steps:

- f. checking whether said combination occurs in said memory (40), and, if so, then establishing that the franking mark is valid, and, if not, then establishing that the franking mark is invalid.--

--7.(Amended) A method according to claim 5, in which also is checked whether a period of validity associated with the franking mark has expired.--

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--8.(Amended) A method according to claim 5, in which, if it is established that the franking mark is valid, a routine is started for automatic post-payment of an account related to the franking mark.--

--9.(Amended) A method according to claim 1, in which the franking mark is located on a postal article which, for the sake of delivery is sorted in at least a first and thereafter a second sorting centre, and in which the steps a and b are executed in the first sorting centre and the information obtained therefrom is sent to a checking centre, after which the steps c and d are executed in the checking centre prior to sorting in the second sorting centre.--

10. A system for checking a franking mark (28) which at least comprises an identification code and a unique bit string, comprising means for:

- a. reading the franking mark (28),
- b. decoding the franking mark (28),

- c. checking whether the identification code is correct by comparing it to data stored in said memory (40),
- d. checking whether the unique bit string is valid by comparing it to data stored in said memory (40).

11. A system according to Claim 10, in which the identification code and the unique bit string are protected with the aid of a Message Authentication Code and/or by means of encoding, and the system also comprises means for checking (902-904) the Message Authentication Code and/or the encoding.

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--12. (Amended) A system according to Claim 10, in which the franking mark comprises a terminal identification code associated with a terminal which provided the unique bit string to a user.---

--13. (Amended) A system according to claim 10, in which the identification code comprises a user identification code and/or a printing identification code, said printing identification code being associated with a printing device which printed the franking mark.--

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--14. (Amended) A system according to claim 10, in which the franking mark comprises a combination of the unique bit string and a counter value, and the system also comprises means for:

- a. subtracting from the counter value a remaining counter value stored with said unique bit string in said memory (40), and checking whether the remaining counter value amounts to more than zero, and, if so, then establishing that the franking mark is valid, and, if not, then establishing that the franking mark is invalid.--

--15. (Amended) A system according to claim 10, in which the franking mark comprises a combination of the unique bit string and a counter value and the system also comprises means for:

- f. checking whether said combination occurs in said memory (40), and, if so, then establishing that the franking mark is valid, and, if not, then establishing that the franking mark is invalid.--

--16. (Amended) A system according to claim 10, also provided with means for checking whether a period of validity associated with the franking mark has expired.--

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--17.(Amended) A system according to Claim 14, which, if it is established that the franking mark is valid, starts a routine for the automatic post-payment of an account associated with the franking mark.--

--18.(Amended) A system according to Claim 10, in which the franking mark is located on a postal article which, for the sake of delivery is sorted in at least a first and thereafter a second sorting centre, and in which the system in the first sorting centre comprises means arranged for executing steps a and b and for sending the information obtained from said steps a and b to a checking centre, and the checking centre comprises means for executing the steps c and d prior to sorting in the second sorting centre.--